

Collaboration is key for working moms with Dreams, Yo!



By Brock Weir

There must be something organic in Aurora that nurtures artists, opine photographer Angela Durante Dukat and painter Meredith Blunt.

When each woman moved to Aurora with their families, neither of them had any idea there were "dozens and dozens" of artists each working out of their homes, waiting for the occasional yearly group art show to make connections and get beneath the surface of what makes each other tick.

Last year, however, Meredith and Angela found kindred spirits in each other and were united by a feeling "a shared sense that they had to collaborate. But, how do a portrait photographer and an artist with a passion for "digital painting" collaborate? By working on shared surfaces to bring out what lies beneath.

Or, to quote Meredith, "Dreams, Yo!"

Okay, so "Dreams, Yo!" might be something Meredith has left in her brain as someone who went through high school in the 1990s, but it is the name of their collaborative art exhibition which opens in Town Hall's Skylight Gallery on June 3.

Dreams, Yo! Combines Angela's fine art portrait photography and Meredith's digital painting to create a vivid depiction that goes far beyond skin deep.

"We had no idea at the time how we could possibly work together," says Angela, outlining some of the ideas they scrapped before landing on this particular vision. "Fantastical is something that characterizes our work. I want my photography to be a little bit fine-arty and a little bit magical."

"You have this really lovely focused, realistic vision," interjects Meredith, pointing out a splashy portrait of a young blonde woman dressed in a vivid pink silk kimono. "Angela was hesitant to put our model in the kimono in the first place because it is so pink, but then it just happened. It was a really organic evolution [stumbling upon the idea of] what is unseen that needs to be seen? There was this layer I would see in it that really wasn't there yet."

As a digital painter and a digital photographer, there is one basic principle that unites them, they agree: pixels.

The more they collaborated on the project, the more they realised, however, this meeting of the minds "and creative vision" goes far beyond a series of tiny digital squares. Angela is a planner, says Meredith, while she is an "eleventh hour last minute magic kind of person," whatever works as moms with a son and a daughter apiece.

?Yes, we are full time working artists, but we are also full time moms,? says Angela. ?We do kind of live on the fly because that's what life with kids is like. It is not really that different when you are producing art. Being a mom, being around the house, and working from home can sometimes really weigh women down. We know this because we talk to a lot of other women who are home and trying to run businesses and do things. Very few people are at home with their kids full time, solely. Many of us are juggling lots of other things. I think it is important for kids to see that creativity doesn't get lost when you're older, it doesn't get lost when you're a mom.?

Meredith says she agrees, and all four of their collective children make significant appearances within the eleven pieces of art ready for display in the Skylight Gallery. One, another vivid pink feature ? a favourite colour of Meredith's ? features Angela's daughter blooming out of a rose that has its roots in her pink ballet tutu. Another image features the children asleep, their bed being carried away into the sky by their dreams.

?It is important children understand that you're more than just a mum, you are a human being who does stuff as well as parent,? says Meredith. ?With my two, there was a lot of shushing and a lot of late nights until 4 a.m. because they were in bed and that was my creative window where I could hear myself think and focus on the images. It is a sacrifice happily made for a project that, in my biased opinion, looks as fantastic as this one does.?

?We want people to have fun when they look at images and see the levels that are there. If you just want to stay on the surface where it is pretty and fun, awesome. If you want to go a little bit deeper and wonder about the stories behind each image, they are there too.?

Adds Angela: ?I want to challenge people to think about how collaborations can bring about new innovations. How can it lead to greater compassion and creative exploration? I believe that if you stand long enough in front of these pieces that when you leave, the neuro-patterns in your brain will have changed if you allow the process to take you over.?